Rules & Regulations and Reality: Rethinking Reference Work in the Library of the Future

Library of Congress Reference Forum
September 28, 2021
Corey Seeman, University of Michigan
cseeman@umich.edu

Presentation Outline & Objectives
- Want to show how we moved into becoming a "library of the future."
- Showcase some of the "thought process" that went into this journey.
- Show some of the problems and opportunities.
- Want you to (hopefully) find one nugget or idea that you can take away.

About Kresge Library
- Kresge Library Services is an independent library service unit at the University of Michigan.
- We receive funding from the Ross School of Business and work collaboratively with colleagues at the main and law libraries on campus.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
Kresge Library

Kresge By the Numbers:
- Total Staff: 19 (9 librarians* & 10 staff)
- Total volumes: 15 (used to have 150K)
- Annual materials budget ($1.1m)
- Annual total budget ($2.4m)
- Reference transactions – around 3-4K/year
- Also support course materials (cases) and LMS for Ross.

About Kresge Library

- Built in mid 1980s to serve the research and curricular needs of the Ross School of Business
- Constant state of “Library Erosion”
- September 2013 – Gift announced
- July 2014 – Print moved out
- Summer 2014-2016 – Kresge Staff in Modular Offices (MOTown)
- Fall 2014 – Rebuilding Kresge Library Services
- January 2017 – Opening of the new building to the school
- Continued tweaking and changes to space.

There are also some actual positives about not having a public space.
- No longer have to worry about evenings and weekends in bad Michigan weather...
- Create a flexible work environment to expand your reach by enabling remote work.
- Pandemic proof – for the most part!

When the pandemic hit – we flipped the switch and were able to jump into the new world order.
- In-person services switched online.
- In-person services that could not be turned virtual were shuttered.

*Librarians also carry a small portion of the staff.
About Kresge Library - Philosophy

- Some of the philosophies that drive my decision making.
- Some of it is making the best of a less than optimal situation.
- We are continually evaluating and tweaking services to reflect changes at the school.
- We try just about anything...

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Kresge Library and Change

"Business has always been subject to uncertainties and change. It is affected by the elements, by war, by mass movements, by changes in the wants and desires of consumers and by government regulation. Above all, competition tends continually to modify the business structure. New methods, new products and new processes introduce new elements that undermine the supremacy of one industry or firm or even a whole system of doing business. And the trend toward increasing regulation of business by governmental bodies here and abroad must not be ignored. In short, one generalization that truly applies to all business is: Change is continuous and inevitable." (bold added)

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Zoom Poll #2 – What Time Period Has the Most Library Change?

- 1960s & 1970s
- 1980s & 1990s
- 2000s
- 2010s
- 2020s (now with MORE COVID-19)
- All of the Above

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Kresge Library and Change

- NOT a library problem of the 21st century.
- Changes in the last 50 years:
  - Copy cataloging
  - Local online catalogs & shared systems
  - Expanded access (TOC, more subject headings)
  - Shared catalogs
  - Discovery layers
  - Working papers management → digital repositories
  - Coffee and food in the library
  - Diminished roles (overall) of departmental libraries
  - How many staff are checking in serials? And while here – what are serials?

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Kresge Library and Change


- It is very easy to think about change only in our world
- However, we have been subjected to change for years and years... and will be subjected to change for years hence

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
Librarians are fantastic about envisioning change when they are leading the way. We have done a good job of embracing the new electronic environment in a hybrid fashion with traditional print volumes and physical media. These incremental changes can add up when pieced together... However, we are likely still behind where our patrons are and where they likely wish we are. Because we collect for the 'long term,' we are likely far more conservative than we should be.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Change in libraries will more likely be a change that is thrust upon us. Are we ready to manage through real change? Are we ready to give up services and resources our good will no longer accommodates? Are we ready to embrace the change being asked – or demanded of us? Change may be a dual edged sword – vibrant schools will demand more changes than stagnant ones.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

There is a strong desire to embrace elements like AI to help with our work. Before we jump all in – lets look at where that technology is right now. Runyon and the Ripples – Google Photos Panoramic.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

As librarians try to figure out reference, we often think there is one solution. But the scope of the requests can vary tremendously. Some have definitive answers (like Sudoku), some do not. We are merely guides or Sherpas to help them learn about the terrain so they can understand what are their next steps. Reference and research are a voyage.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
Library challenge is that we have multiple stakeholders and they have different needs – especially for business.

- Faculty needs: scholarly journals, articles, books, datasets
- Student needs: articles, company & industry information, market reports
- Community: Mostly similar to student needs

In addition to clarity, our reference work really is driven by the appetite of our users & the scope of their research.

- For many of us, there is not a great deal of information on our topic.
- That is still an important part of the process.

Embrace the Change.

- You need to be flexible and deal with change as it comes.
- “A completely re-thought Kresge Library Services, transitions from a collection of physical reference materials to a full suite of information resources and research services, guided by expert staff,” - Ross Dividend, Fall 2016 (Ross Alumni Magazine)
- The library did not close, but became virtually unrecognizable.
- You do not always choose your path, but how you respond to the challenges.
Zoom Poll #3 - How do questions arrive at your "desk?" (click all that apply)

- Phone call
- Email
- Reference desk
- Carrier pigeon
- Message in a bottle
- Attached to a brick & thrown through your window
- None of the above
- All of the above
- What's Reference?

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

New Library Rules & Laws

- Librarianship is a rule bound profession
- Important for people to explore different libraries and interoperability.
- Could be a way that we drive a wedge between us and our users.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Understand the difference between a known item search and an unknown item search.

- Squirrels at the Met (NYC)
- Bottle from Salem, NC - ca. 1790–1805.
- Snuffbox from Germany (Schrezheim manufactory), ca. 1761-1770. In Gallery 538 – closed the day I went.

Dr. Ranganathan’s Five Laws (1931)

- First Law: Books are for use
- Second Law: Every reader his / her book
- Third Law: Every book its reader
- Fourth Law: Save the time of the reader
- Fifth Law: The library is a growing organism

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
New Library Rules & Laws

- Dr. Ranganathan's Fourth Law - Save the time of the reader
- This is the "technical services" law about cataloging in a closed stack environment.
- Today, it can be a way we help provide clarity for people who are not as familiar with information resources like librarians.
- Our work with Action Learning Teams is to support their research needs.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Zombieland Rule #32 – Enjoy the Little Things
- What I want to focus on is the simplicity of tagging as a means of findability.
- If you are a creator of content, you will see and understand how information flows and how items are found.
- This can be illustrated with my work in tagging on flickr.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

While tagging can be sloppy, it is findable and very simple to manage.
- Found by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and then by news services.

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

Zingerman’s 12 Natural Laws of Business (Ari Weinzweig)
- LAW #9 : Success means you get better problems.
- We find this when we receive direct questions that come from researchers (faculty and students).
- Success does not mean work goes away – it means you get more questions!

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
New Library Rules & Laws

- “This one is a bit of a mind bend until you accept it. But as soon as you have, it becomes a befuddled glimpse of the obvious.” I asked you whether you can imagine it. And you did. And you laughed at me, right? And yet, each of us, at least secretly, believes that when we get to that next stage, meet that next goal, life will become magically problem free. The truth is, you’ll just have different problems, and if the next stage or goal is getting you greater problems, call it a win! Example: You obsess about customer service and are nationally recognized for it. Good Problem: You have lines out of the door and are getting customer complaints for the wait time. Less Good Problem: You don’t obsess about customer service, you have no lines and no one complains about the wait.”

http://info.zingtrain.com/zingermans-12-natural-laws-of-business?_ga=2.237168901.402973041.1632699346-369966816.1632699346

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

---

Closing Thoughts – Be Flexible

- At Kresge, the “Ethereal Library’s” value proposition is:
  - Live within the restrictions of virtually no collection space.
  - Figure out new collaboration mechanisms to serve our community.
  - Focus on what we can do vs. what we have done.
  - Forget the dead, take care of the living!

Squirrel of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)
Closing Thoughts – Beware Dashboard Indicators

They will not tell you about the person behind you!

Thank you
Corey Seeman
cseeman@umich.edu

Kresge - [Link]
https://www.bus.umich.edu/Kresgelibrary/

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)

For More Fun….

- "The Ethereal Library: Our Experience in Library Futures at the Kresge Library," presentation to be given at the International Conference on Next Generation Libraries (KOL-2019) to be held December 12-14, 2019 at National Institute of Technology, Rourkela, India. Virtual participant of the meeting.[Link]
- "Don’t Get Married to the Results: Managing Library Change in the Age of Metrics." Presentation at the 2015 Charleston (SC) Conference, November 2015. [Link] / [Transcription of Talk]
- Also visit - [Link]

Rules & Regs and Reality - Seeman (Library of Congress Reference Forum 2021)